



Children's Dental Health Improvement Act of 2004
Introduced by
Representatives Michael Simpson (R-ID) and John D. Dingell (D-MI)

The Children's Dental Health Improvement Act includes provisions to improve access to dental care in the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). It also establishes several new grant programs that aim to increase access to oral health care services, particularly in underserved areas and among at-risk populations, such as rural areas and children from low-income families. The legislation would also support school-based oral health literacy programs and create new or expand existing school-linked dental sealant programs.

In brief, the bill would:

- **Increase Children's Enrollment and Participation in Dental Services under Medicaid and CHIP.** The bill would improve children's access to dental care in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). States would have the option to use their CHIP funding to provide wrap around coverage for dental care to low-income children enrolled in private insurance. States could provide dental-only coverage, or could fill in the gaps in private insurance for all services, or just cost sharing. States also must ensure their CHIP programs provide dental coverage that is substantially equivalent to the coverage provided under private insurance. States must have a comprehensive plan for improving the delivery of dental services, as well as adequately reimburse dentists for children's dental services.
- **Increase Access to Pediatric Dental Care in Shortage Areas/Populations.** In an effort to expand the availability of primary pediatric dental services in federally-designated underserved areas, the bill would provide grants for eligible entities, such as community health centers, to hire and retain dental health care providers.

Individual dentists also could be eligible for grants, provided they are licensed dentists who agree to practice in a federally-designated dental health professional shortage area or whose patient population is made up of at least 25 percent of Medicaid, SCHIP, or uninsured patients. These dentists would receive a \$1,000 bonus for each month they were in compliance with the eligibility requirements. In addition, the bill allows for demonstration projects to improve access to dental services for children in underserved areas.

- **Encourage Basic Oral Health Promotion.** The bill also provides \$50 million in grant

funding beginning in FY 2005 to help states improve basic oral health promotion. States could use the grant funds for initiatives such as: building coalitions with private sector and other interest groups; promoting the public's oral health awareness and literacy; supporting training programs for dental health professionals to strengthen oral health promotion programs; and other actions.

- **Create a Federal Oral Health Initiative.** The bill establishes a federal Oral Health Initiative within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to reduce disparities in the oral health for children of low-income families and children with developmental disabilities. The bill will improve the focus on oral health by establishing a Chief Dental Officer in the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to oversee their oral health programs. These Chief Dental Officers as well as the agency Administrators would be responsible for coordinating the activities of HHS's Oral Health Initiative.
- **Create New Indian Health Service Initiatives.** The bill establishes in the Indian Health Service (IHS) a multi-year retention bonus -- up to \$14,000 -- for eligible dental officers who agree to remain on active duty after the completion of any other active service commitment to IHS. It also would fund demonstration projects that seek to increase access to pediatric dental services in underserved tribal areas.
- **Improve Dental-Related Data Collection.** The bill requires CDC to submit annual reports to Congress regarding the dental, craniofacial, and oral health of residents in all 50 states and certain Indian tribes.
- **Expand School-Linked Dental Sealant Programs.** The bill seeks to expand the school-based dental sealant program to include Indian tribes and eligible school-linked public or non-profit organizations that are under contract with an elementary or secondary school to provide dental services to school-aged children.
- **Decrease Early Childhood Caries.** The bill would require CDC to: (1) expand surveillance activities to include the identification of children at high risk of early childhood caries; (2) assist state, local, and tribal health agencies to collect, analyze, and disseminate data on early childhood caries; and (3) provide for the development of public health nursing programs and public health education programs on early childhood caries.